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Fourth Edition

## BASIC SET CHARACTERS



Steve Jackson

Sean Punch

David L. Pulver

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*This is Book 1 of the two-volume **Basic Set**. Only this book is necessary to play. Game Masters, and players wanting more detail, will find Book 2 valuable.*

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Fourth Edition

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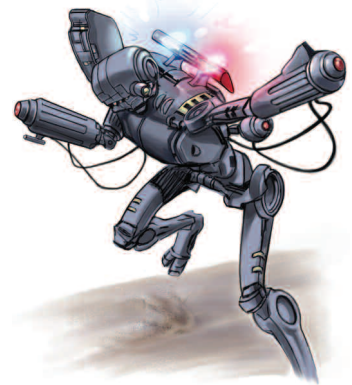
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# INTRODUCTION

**GURPS** stands for “Generic Universal RolePlaying System.” It was originally a joke . . . a code word to describe the game while we looked for a “real” name. Years went by – literally! – as the game developed. We never found a better name, and now that the Fourth Edition is in your hands, the name is more appropriate than ever.

“Generic.” Some people like quick, fast-moving games, where the referee makes lots of decisions to keep things moving. Others want ultimate detail, with rules for every contingency. Most of us fall somewhere in between. **GURPS** starts with simple rules, and – especially in the combat system – builds up to as much *optional* detail as you like. But it’s still the same game. You may all use it differently, but your campaigns will all be compatible.

“Universal.” I’ve always thought it was silly for game companies to publish one set of rules for fantasy, another one for Old West, another one for science fiction, and another one for super powers. **GURPS** is *one* set of rules that’s comprehensive enough to let you use *any* background. There are worldbooks and supplements that “fine-tune” the generic system for any game world you want. But they *are* still compatible. If you want to take your Wild West gunslinger and your WWII commando fortune hunting in Renaissance Italy . . . go for it! And because that’s exactly the kind of game that so many of our fans play, the Fourth Edition adds an overarching background created to support just such campaigns.

“RolePlaying.” This is not just a hack-and-slash game. The rules are written to make true roleplaying possible – and, in fact, to encourage it. **GURPS** is a game in which you take on the persona of another character – and pretend, for a little while, to *be* that character.

“System.” It really is. Most other RPGs started out as a simple set of rules, and then were patched and modified, ad infinitum. That makes them hard to play. **GURPS**, more than ever in

the Fourth Edition, is a unified whole. We’ve gone to a great deal of effort to make sure that it all works together, and it all *works*. **GURPS** will let you create any character you can imagine, and do anything you can think of . . . and it all makes sense.

**GURPS** has been in print now for nearly 35 years. It was not designed in a vacuum; every game builds on the ones that came before. We learn from our successes – and from the successes of others. I think the best games are those that are simple, clear and easy to read, and I’ve tried hard to make **GURPS** “friendly.”

One important influence was Hero Games’ **Champions**, for the flexibility of its character-creation system. Another was Flying Buffalo’s **Tunnels & Trolls**, for its appeal to solitaire gamers. Finally, M.A.R. Barker’s **Empire of the Petal Throne** remains noteworthy, even after decades of competition and imitation, for the detail and richness of its alien game world.

But there’s more to **GURPS** than trying to repeat past success. The failures of earlier systems are important, too. In **GURPS**, I’ve tried to achieve several things I think earlier designs missed.

First and foremost, of course, is the *flexibility* of a “universal” system. Others have tried this, but have fallen into the twin traps of watered-down combat (where a lightning bolt is just like a .45 pistol) or incompatibility (where players have to learn so many alternate rules for each new game and characters don’t easily cross over). **GURPS** presents a single, unified system that allows for great diversity without losing its coherence. This Fourth Edition incorporates dozens of rules that originally appeared in supplements published for the Third Edition. They seemed important enough to bring into the **Basic Set** – so here they are.

Second is *organization*. Every gamer has had the experience of hunting frantically through one book after another,

looking for a rule . . . and not finding it. **GURPS** is extensively cross-referenced, with a Table of Contents, an Index, and a Glossary of terms used in the game.

Third is *ease of play*. In **GURPS**, most of the detailed calculations are done before you start play . . . they are entered on the character sheet, and saved until you need them. Once play actually begins, it should not be complex. I’ve tried to make **GURPS** as fast-moving yet realistic as possible. It’s up to you to decide whether I succeeded.

Most roleplaying systems depend for their success on a continual flow of “official” supplements and adventures. **GURPS** is different. True, we’ve released a lot of material already, and we plan to do much more; a totally universal system offers great leeway, and we’ve got a supplement list as long as your arm. But **GURPS** is designed to be as compatible as possible with supplements written for *different* games. The reason? Simple. Suppose that you’re a **GURPS** player. You’re at the hobby shop, and you see a really interesting supplement package. But it’s by another publisher, for another game.

No problem. The **GURPS** system breaks everything down into plain English and simple numbers. Distances are given in feet and miles, rather than arbitrary units; times are given in minutes and seconds. That’s what makes it generic. That also makes it easy to translate. If you see an interesting supplement for another game, go right ahead and get it. You can use it as a sourcebook for **GURPS**.

Likewise, if your gaming group favors other systems . . . you can still use your **GURPS** adventures. As long as that other game uses units that you can translate into feet, minutes, and other plain-English terms, you can import your **GURPS** adventures.

When **GURPS** was launched, we dreamed of its becoming the “standard” roleplaying system. The hobby has grown hugely since then! There will never be a single standard . . . but **GURPS** is *one* of the standards, and that’s fine. We have never tried to drive others out of the market, or even to force them to conform to us. Instead, *we* are conforming to *them* – by producing a system that will work with *any* clearly written adventure.



At any rate, here it is. I'm satisfied that **GURPS** is the most realistic, flexible, and "universal" system ever developed. This Fourth Edition is the culmination of 18 years of continuous development and two years of concerted revision. I hope you like it.

In closing, I want to acknowledge and thank the two revisors of this edition. Sean Punch, the **GURPS** line editor, and David Pulver spent two years collating feedback, experimenting with variant systems, and knitting a decade and a half of rules material into a coherent whole. It would not have happened without them.

– Steve Jackson

## Notes on the Fourth Edition

This edition represents a leap forward in more ways than just rules. As the hobby has changed, so have the standards and expectations for role-playing-game supplements. So . . .

- *The core rulebooks are bigger.* Feedback has been clear on this point. Gamers dislike it when basic rules are "held hostage" in supplements. They want as much as possible in the **Basic Set** so they can use it to run almost any kind of game.

- *Support is ongoing.* Still, there will be lots of supplements! Thanks to our online store, Warehouse 23, we can quickly and easily release these in digital form, and *update* them to fix errata.

- *Supplements are modular.* Print books aren't profitable below a certain size, but digital releases can be short, which allows more focus and specialization. This lets you customize the perfect toolkit without investing a ton of money.

Holding this book, you might ask, "Why does this edition of the **Basic Set** come in *two* volumes? Why not one *big* book, like the Third Edition and lots of other RPGs?" The answer involves a bit of history . . .

The first two editions of **Basic Set** – released in 1986 and 1987 – were boxed sets containing cardboard figures, combat maps, dice, and *two* rulebooks (sound familiar?). **Book 1: Characters** was aimed mainly at players, while **Book 2: Adventuring** was more of a GM's guide. This was a logical division of content for a RPG, and quite common in the '80s.

By the time of the third edition (1988), gamers had come to prefer

## About the Authors

### Steve Jackson

Steve Jackson has been playing games for entirely too many years, and designing them professionally since 1977. His other game-design credits include **Ogre** and **G.E.V.**, the award-winning **Illuminati**, the best-selling **Car Wars**, the atrocious **Munchkin** and its offshoots, and many others. He has served as an officer and volunteer for various industry associations, and was the youngest person ever inducted into the Origins "Hall of Fame."

He is the founder of Steve Jackson Games, in Austin, Texas.

Steve is an active member of the Science Fiction Writers of America. He is a semi-retired science fiction *fan*, and once spent a great deal of time writing for various zines and helping to run conventions. He now enjoys reading others' writing and attending others' cons. So it goes.

His other hobbies include surfing the net, playing with Lego and rolling-ball toys, gardening (especially water lilies), and tropical fish.

### David L. Pulver

David L. Pulver was born in Kingston, Ontario and grew up in Canada, England, and New Zealand. He has been a science fiction fan for most of his life, an avid gamer since 1978, and a professional author since 1988. **GURPS Ultra-Tech** was his first book. He has written or co-authored over 75 RPG books including **Transhuman Space**, the Second and Third Editions of **Big Eyes, Small Mouth**, and the **GURPS Spaceships** series, as well as hundreds of magazine articles. David lives on Vancouver Island.

### Sean M. Punch

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995. In that capacity, he has written, edited, or contributed to some 150 **GURPS** releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to **Pyramid** magazine. From 2008, he has served as the lead creator of the **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** series, which led to his design of the **Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game**, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango (and occasionally tending bar). He lives in Montréal, Québec with *son amour*, Geneviève.

economical all-in-one rulebooks to expensive boxed sets. We decided to dispense with the box and release **Basic Set, Third Edition** as a single book. We managed to shoehorn everything into one volume. We continued to call it the **Basic Set** – even though it was not a boxed set – so that retailers and customers would know that it was the same game.

By 1995, we had published over 100 titles for **GURPS**. However, it just wasn't feasible to keep them all in print, so it became progressively harder to find certain supplements. Meanwhile, gamers with large **GURPS** libraries were finding it increasingly difficult to locate specific rules. To solve these problems, we compiled the most frequently used rules from all of **GURPS** into two expansion volumes: **Compendium I:**

### **Character Creation and Compendium II: Combat and Campaigns.**

Most **GURPS** supplements written between 1996 and 2003 required one or both of the **Compendia**. The basic rules had effectively spread to *three* books. In the process, several internal inconsistencies became evident – the almost-inevitable result of growth by agglomeration.

**Basic Set, Fourth Edition** addresses the inconsistencies by recasting **Basic Set, Third Edition** and the two **Compendia** as a unified system. It occupies two volumes not because we think we will make more money that way, but because condensing three books into one proved impossible – there was too much material! But these two volumes contain the best of 18 years of **GURPS** development, making **Fourth Edition** *comprehensive* in a way that few other RPGs are.

And because this edition's *Basic Set* is comprehensive, there is no need to "bolt on" extra rules that will come to be seen as mandatory. This should

put the brakes on growth by agglomeration. The *Basic Set* is truly all you need to run nearly any kind of game:

fantasy, science fiction, supers, horror . . . *anything*. We believe that's a big win, and we think you will agree!

– Sean Punch

# WHAT IS ROLEPLAYING?

In a roleplaying game (RPG), each player takes the part of a "character" participating in a fictional adventure. A referee, called the Game Master (GM), chooses the adventure. He determines the background and plays the part of the other people the characters meet during their adventure. The adventure may have a fixed objective – save the Princess, find the treasure, stop the invasion – or it may be open-ended, with the characters moving from one escapade to the next. A roleplaying "campaign" can be open-ended, lasting for *years*, as characters (and players) come and go. It's all up to the GM and the players.

No game board is necessary for a roleplaying game – although some systems, including *GURPS*, include optional "boardgame" rules for combat situations. Instead, the game is played *verbally*. The GM describes the situation and tells the players what their characters see and hear. The players then describe what they are doing to meet the challenge. The GM describes the results of these actions . . . and so on. Depending on the situation, the GM may determine what happens arbitrarily (for the best possible story), by referring to specific game rules (to decide what is realistically possible), or by rolling dice (to give an interesting random result).

Part of the object of a roleplaying game is to have each player meet the situation as his *character* would. A roleplaying game can let a player take the part of a stern Japanese samurai, a medieval jester, a wise priest, a stow-away gutter kid on her first star-trip . . . or absolutely anyone else. In a given situation, all those characters would react differently. And that's what roleplaying is about! Thus, good roleplaying teaches cooperation among the players, and broadens their viewpoints.

But roleplaying is not purely educational. It's also one of the most creative possible entertainments. Most entertainment is passive: the audience just sits and watches, without taking part in the creative process. In roleplaying,

the "audience" joins in the creation. The GM is the chief storyteller, but the players are responsible for portraying their characters. If they want something to happen in the story, they *make* it happen, because they're in the story. Other types of media are

mass-produced to please the widest possible audience, but each roleplaying adventure is an individual gem, crafted by those who take part in it. The GM provides the raw material, but the final polish comes from the players themselves.

## Mini-Glossary

Below are a few important terms used in this book. The complete glossary appears on pp. 563-565.

**advantage:** A useful *trait* that gives you an "edge" over another person with comparable *attributes* and *skills*. See Chapter 2.

**attributes:** Four numbers – *Strength*, *Dexterity*, *Intelligence*, and *Health* – that rate a character's most basic abilities. Higher is always better! See pp. 14-15.

**cinematic:** A style of play where the needs of the story outweigh those of realism, even when that would produce improbable results. See p. 488.

**d:** Short for "dice." "Roll 3d" means "roll three ordinary six-sided dice and add them up." See p. 9.

**Dexterity (DX):** An *attribute* that measures agility and coordination. See p. 15.

**disadvantage:** A problem that renders you less capable than your other *traits* would indicate. See Chapter 3.

**enhancement:** An extra capability added to a *trait*. This increases the *point* cost of the trait by a percentage. See pp. 102-109.

**Fatigue Points (FP):** A measure of resistance to exhaustion. See p. 16.

**Health (HT):** An *attribute* that measures physical grit and vitality. See p. 15.

**Hit Points (HP):** A measure of ability to absorb punishment. See p. 16.

**Intelligence (IQ):** An *attribute* that measures brainpower. See p. 15.

**limitation:** A restriction on the use of a *trait*. This reduces the *point* cost of the trait by a percentage. See pp. 110-117.

**point:** The unit of "currency" spent to buy *traits* for a character. The more points you have, the more capable you are. Point costs for traits are often written in brackets; e.g., "Combat Reflexes [15]" means the Combat Reflexes trait costs 15 points. See p. 10.

**prerequisite:** A *trait* you must have to qualify for another trait. If the prerequisite is a *skill*, you must have at least one *point* in it. See p. 169.

**skill:** A number defining your trained ability in an area of knowledge or broad class of tasks. See Chapter 4.

**Strength (ST):** An *attribute* that measures physical muscle and bulk. See p. 14.

**trait:** An *advantage*, *attribute*, *disadvantage*, *skill*, or other character "building block" that affects game play and costs *points* to add, modify, or remove.

## Materials Needed for Play

- **GURPS Basic Set Characters.** Everyone will need access to this book in order to create characters and look up character abilities. A large group will find it handy to have *several* copies available, especially during character creation.
- **GURPS Basic Set Campaigns.** The GM will need a copy of this book, which contains rules for success rolls, physical feats, combat, injury, animals, and vehicles, as well as advice on how to run the game and design a campaign.
- **Character sheets.** Each player will need a copy of the Character Sheet (pp. 335-336) on which to record his PC's statistics. You may make as many copies as you like for your own use (but *not* for resale).
- **Three six-sided dice.** A set of three dice for each player, and another set for the GM, is even better.
- **Pencils and scratch paper.** For taking notes, sketching maps, etc.

The other important thing about roleplaying is that it doesn't have to be competitive. In most roleplaying situations, the party will succeed or fail as a group, depending on how well they cooperate. The greatest rewards of good roleplaying come not in "winning," but in *character development*. The more successfully a player portrays his character (as judged by the GM), the more that character will gain in ability.

When it's all said and done, the GM and the players will have created a story . . . the story of how the characters met, learned to work together, encountered a challenge, and (we hope) triumphed!

## HOW TO LEARN GURPS

If you have some experience with roleplaying games already, you should find **GURPS** easy to pick up. But if this is your first RPG, you'll have a little more to learn. Relax – if you got this far, you'll be fine!

Don't be alarmed by the physical size of the game. There's a lot of material here – two thick books – but we've done our best to make it easy to use.

The tables of contents (pp. 3-4 and 339-341) and the index (pp. 329-334 or 570-575) are as detailed as we could manage.

We've also added several features to make the rules easier to learn. The *Quick-Start* (below) and *Conventions* (p. 9) sections cover the most important game concepts. The *Glossary* (pp. 563-565) defines the terms used in the game – and an abridged version (see *Mini-Glossary*, p. 7) appears here so you can understand the *Quick Start* rules without flipping pages.

The best way to learn **GURPS** is to join a group of friends who already play. If you're starting out on your own, here's what we recommend:

1. Quickly skim this book, just to get the flavor of the game. Don't worry about the details yet.
2. Read the *Mini-Glossary* (p. 7) to learn the basic terminology.
3. Read the *Quick-Start* and *Conventions* sections to learn the basic game concepts.
4. Read *Creating a Character* (pp. 10-12) to get an idea of the different things characters can do.
5. Read the rest of the rules in detail, as your time permits.

**GURPS Lite** may also be useful to you. It's a 32-page distillation of the basic system; you can download it free at [gurps.sjgames.com/lite](http://gurps.sjgames.com/lite).

Once you have absorbed the rules, you can be the GM for your friends, and help *them* learn the game. You can do whatever you want . . . that's the whole point of the system.

Most important: Have fun!

## QUICK START

This section is a brief guide to the whole **GURPS** game system. The **Basic Set** spans two thick volumes, but most of that is detail, "color," and special cases. The game system is actually *easy*.

**GURPS** is designed to be "friendly," both for the player and the Game Master. The rulebooks include a lot of detail, but they're indexed and cross-referenced to make things easy to find. And all the detail is optional – use it only when it makes the game more fun.

There are only three basic "game mechanics" in **GURPS**. Learn these and you can start to play.

(1) **Success Rolls.** A "success roll" is a die roll made when you need to "test" one of your skills or attributes. For instance, you might test, or *roll against*,

your Strength to stop a heavy door from closing, or against your Guns skill to hit an enemy with your pistol.

The only dice used in **GURPS** are six-sided ones. Roll three dice for a success roll. If your roll is *less than or equal to* the skill or ability you are testing, you succeeded. Otherwise, you failed. For example, if you are rolling against Strength, and your ST level is 12, a roll of 12 or less succeeds.

Sometimes you will have *modifiers* to a roll. For instance, if you were trying to stop a *very heavy* door from closing, you might have to roll against Strength at -2 (or ST-2, for short). In that case, with a Strength of 12, you would need to roll a 10 or less to succeed. Rolling a 10 or less is harder than rolling a 12 or less, just as stopping a

heavy door is harder than stopping an ordinary one.

For an especially easy task, you would get a *bonus* to your attempt. You might roll "Animal Handling+4" to make friends with a very friendly dog. If your Animal Handling skill were 12, a roll of 16 or less would succeed. Making a roll of 16 or less is easier than making the base skill roll of 12 or less, because a friendly dog is easy to deal with.

For details on success rolls, see pp. 343-361.

(2) **Reaction Rolls.** A "reaction roll" is a roll made by the Game Master (or GM) to determine how his nonplayer characters (NPCs) react to the player characters. This roll is always optional; the GM may predetermine reactions.

But sometimes it's more fun to let the dice control the reactions.

To check reactions, the GM rolls 3 dice and consults the *Reaction Table* (pp. 560-561). The higher his roll, the better the NPCs will react, and the better the treatment they will give the PCs.

Many traits give *reaction modifiers* that add to or subtract from reaction rolls. If you have a +2 reaction due to your good looks, the GM will add 2 to any reaction roll made by someone who can see you. This is likely to improve the way they behave toward you!

For details on reaction rolls, see p. 494.

(3) *Damage Rolls.* A "damage roll" is a roll made in a fight, to see how much harm you did to your foe. Damage rolls use the "dice+adds" system (see *Dice*, below).

Many things can affect the final injury inflicted by your attack. Armor reduces the damage received by the wearer. Certain attacks do extra damage if they get through armor. "Critical hits" can do extra damage. All these things are explained in the combat rules – see Chapters 11-13. But the combat system is "modular"; you can use *all* the rules for a complex, detailed, realistic combat simulation – or just those in Chapter 11 for a quick game.

There's another important system – but you don't need to know it to start with. It's the *character creation* system. The GM will give each player a number of points to spend on his character. High attribute levels cost points, as do advantages and skills. Disadvantages, such as Greed and Berserk, are also available; these give you *extra* points. Details appear in Chapters 1-4.

These rules let you do all your calculations *before* play starts, and enter them on the Character Sheet (p. 13). That way, you don't have to bother with calculations during play!

Got all that? Good. Now you can play *GURPS*. The rest is just detail. Have fun.

## CONVENTIONS

*GURPS* uses the following mathematical conventions.

### Dice

*GURPS* uses six-sided dice only. All "success rolls," and most other rolls, require you to throw three dice ("3d") at once, add up the number of pips, and compare the total to a "target number."

To figure combat damage, and for many other things, *GURPS* uses the "dice+adds" system. If a weapon does "4d+2" damage, this is shorthand for "roll 4 dice and add 2 to the total." Likewise, "3d-3" means "roll 3 dice and subtract 3 from the total."

If you see just "2d," that means "roll two dice." For instance, if an adventure says, "The base is guarded by 5d human soldiers and 2d+1 robots," that's short for, "Roll five dice for the number of human guards at the base. Then roll two dice, and add 1, for the number of robots."

For really huge numbers, dice can be multiplied. For instance, "2d×10" means "roll 2 dice and multiply by 10."

### Rounding

A mathematical formula is often the best way to ensure that a rule is fair, realistic, or universal. But formulas sometimes yield inconvenient fractions. Except where instructed otherwise, round off fractions as follows:

*Round up for point costs.* When you modify a point cost by a percentage, or multiply it by a factor, round all fractions *up*. For instance, a 25% enhancement to a 15-point ability would result in 18.75 points, which would round to 19 points. For negative numbers, "up" means "in the positive direction"; e.g., if you multiply -7 points by 1/2 to get -3.5 points, round the result to -3 points.

*Round down for character feats and combat results.* When you do math to determine what a character can do – how much he can lift, how far he can jump, etc. – or to calculate injury or other combat results, round all fractions *down*. For instance, for an attack that inflicts 3 points of injury with a 50% damage bonus, round down from 4.5 to 4 points.

Exceptions and special cases (such as "round to the nearest whole number" or "do not round off") are noted explicitly with the relevant rule.

## Metric Conversions

*GURPS* uses the old imperial units of measurement, rather than metric, because most of our readers are Americans who use the old system. But not all! Every year, more and more people in the rest of the world start *GURPS* campaigns. And outside the U.S., people think in metric. We can't afford to do two editions of everything, but we *can* provide this conversion table.

Note that there are two conversion columns. The first column is an approximation, easy to do in your head, and good enough for gaming. The second column is the *real* metric equivalent, for those times when you want to be exact.

<i>Imperial</i>	<i>Game Metric</i>	<i>Real Metric</i>
1 inch (in.)	2.5 cm	2.54 cm
1 foot (ft.)	30 cm	30.48 cm
1 yard (yd.)	1 meter	0.914 meters
1 mile (mi.)	1.5 km	1.609 km
1 pound (lb.)	0.5 kg	0.454 kg
1 ton	1 metric ton	0.907 metric tons
1 gallon (gal.)	4 liters	3.785 liters
1 quart (qt.)	1 liter	0.946 liters
1 ounce (oz.)	30 grams	28.349 grams
1 cubic inch (ci)	16 cubic cm	16.387 cu. cm
1 cubic yard (cy)	0.75 cubic m	0.765 cubic m

*Temperature:* When dealing with changes in temperature, one Fahrenheit degree is 5/9 the size of a degree Celsius. So a change of 45°F is equal to a change of 25°C. To convert actual thermometer readings, subtract 32 from the Fahrenheit temperature and multiply the result by 5/9. So 95°F is 5/9 of (95-32), or 5/9 of 63, or 35°C.

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This index covers both books of the *Basic Set*. The pages are sequentially numbered; Book 2 starts on p. 337.

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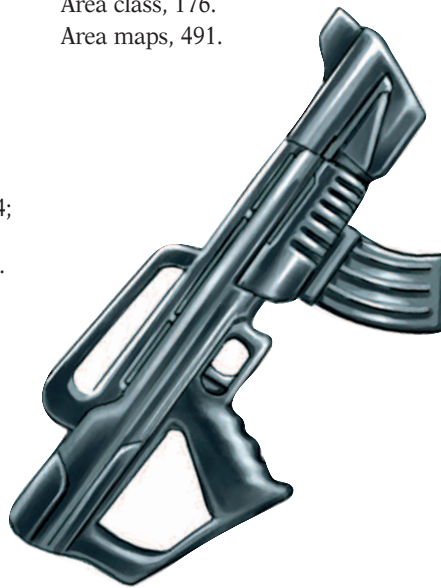
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